

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**BEFORE**  
**THE HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE**  
**ON**  
**DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS**  
**BY**  
**BRIGADIER GENERAL JOHN W. NICHOLSON**  
**U.S. ARMY (RETIRED)**  
**SECRETARY**  
**AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION**

**March 30, 2006**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I open my statement with the words of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz:

"They fought together as brothers-in-arms. They died together and now they sleep side by side. To them we have a solemn obligation."

These words are inscribed on the World War II Memorial. They express beautifully the idea that a nation's greatness is reflected in the way it chooses to honor its war dead. The words provide a moral compass for the American Battle Monuments Commission's worldwide commemorative programs.

As General Franks noted, we are focusing our efforts and resources on programs and activities that contribute directly to accomplishing our strategic goals.

Our fiscal year 2007 appropriation request for \$40.738 million funds the Commission's Salaries and Expenses Account as well as our Foreign Currency Fluctuation Account.

For our Salaries and Expenses Account, we request \$35.838 million to support the Commission's requirements for personnel costs, service fees, scheduled maintenance and repairs, supplies, materials, spare parts, equipment replacement, and capital improvements.

For our Foreign Currency Fluctuation Account, we request \$4.9 million to replenish the funds needed to defray losses experienced due to currency fluctuation so we can maintain our buying power for services and materials to operate and sustain our commemorative sites in the European and Mediterranean Regions.

Our facilities, most constructed following World War I and World War II, have aged considerably. Over time, deterioration accelerates and the costs of materials, labor and utilities increase around the world. We are allocating \$2 million toward high-priority engineering projects specifically designed to protect the American people's investment in the commemorative sites for which we are responsible. This funding will be used to perform periodic maintenance and to correct deficiencies within our infrastructure.

Since 2002, the Commission has been in the process of designing and constructing an Interpretive Center at the Normandy American Cemetery in France. The Center will tell the story of the 9,387 American soldiers buried at Normandy and the 1,557 missing in action memorialized there. Construction is progressing well, and we plan to open the new center by early summer 2007.

Our FY 2007 appropriation request contains \$1.042 million to fund the initial costs for personnel, facilities maintenance and support necessary to initiate operations at the new Normandy Interpretive Center. Associated with our appropriation request is

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an increase in staffing levels from 391 to 404 Full-Time Equivalent positions to allow us to hire personnel to staff the Center when it opens.

Our challenge is to sustain the high standards of excellence we have set in maintaining our commemorative sites as shrines to America's War Dead. Concurrently, we plan to do a better job of telling the story of these uniquely splendid cemeteries and memorials. They inspire patriotism, evoke gratitude, and teach lessons of history to all who visit.

We are grateful for the support we receive from the House. The trust you place in us and your understanding of our operational needs ensures that we have sufficient resources, when we need them, to sustain our operations.

I would like to close by introducing the members of my staff that accompanied me today:

- Brigadier General William Leszczynski, U.S. Army (Retired), Executive Director and Chief Operations Officer;
- Guy Giancarlo, Director of Finance;
- Alan Gregory, Budget Officer;
- Tom Sole, Director of Engineering and Maintenance; and
- Mike Conley, Director of Public Affairs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my opening statement. I will be pleased to respond to your questions.